

**Food Sovereignty, Glocalization, and Scale: Perspectives from the U.S. and France**

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## Introduction

In the past few decades, peasants, landless peoples, migrants, women farmers, and agricultural workers have been organizing against the macro-economic neoliberal policies that control food sources and agricultural production put in place by the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and those countries, largely in the Global North, who hold the most economic power. La Via Campesina<sup>1</sup>, formed in 1993, brought these people together in an international, decentralized movement designed to give them a common vision expressed through the idea of food sovereignty. In their own words, food sovereignty is “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sustainable methods, to define their own agriculture and food policies, to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and trade, and to determine the extent to which they want to be self reliant” (La Via Campesina). At its core, food sovereignty calls for the redistribution of land so as to democratize food systems, giving power back to those who produce the majority of the world’s food supply. La Via Campesina has now grown to include 164 local and national organizations in 73 countries, and the concept of food sovereignty has gained critical attention.<sup>2</sup> The day-to-day development of food sovereignty by organizations in specific communities, however, is often glossed over, largely because it is unclear as to what it looks like in practice. To help fill this academic void, my research identifies and analyzes two food sovereignty initiatives affiliated with La Via Campesina, Community Farm Alliance (CFA) and La

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<sup>1</sup> The Peasant Way. All Translations from Spanish and French are mine, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> La Via Campesina’s organizational structure is based on the decentralization of power between 9 geographical regions: Northern and Central Africa, South Africa, South America, Central America, North America, Europe, Southeast and East Asia, South Asia, and the Carribean. The International Coordinating Committee, comprised of one man and one woman from each region, determines how the organizations in each region work together and allocates funds to each region. The international secretariate, or their main office, changes locations according to a collective decision made by the Committee; today, it is located in Harare, Zimbabwe (La Via Campesina).

Confédération Paysanne (La Conf), located in Kentucky, U.S., and Bagnole, France, respectively.

Furthermore, my research investigates the ways in which food sovereignty is adapted to and reshaped by different contexts, social relationships, and cultural forms. This process of adaptation can be described by the concept of glocalization. Following Roland Robertson and George Ritzer, glocalization refers to the influence of global processes on local development, and how the global flow of ideas, technologies, and culture are uniquely reshaped in local contexts. Moreover, glocalization is an inter-scalar process, where scale is understood as a matter of relation rather than hierarchy or size. In other words, the local, regional, national, and global scales exist in dialectical relations with each other; the global is part of the local as much as the local is part of the global. Food sovereignty initiatives, as represented by CFA and La Conf, develop through the glocalization of the concept of food sovereignty, but the ways in which they put it into practice depends on interactions with other social actors and material realities on multiple, interdependent scales.

My discussion will first provide a critical literature review on the concept of food sovereignty in general, followed by theoretical discussions on glocalization and the production of locality to help frame my ethnographic research. In conjunction with the my review of locality, I will briefly focus on local food movements in the U.S. and Europe, as these largely depoliticized social movements intersect in interesting ways with the work of CFA and La Conf, respectively. I will then present the idea of geographic scale as relational rather than hierarchical or proportional. The relationality of scales further focuses on the creation of networks through which social actors interact with each other and their situational material realities. This understanding of scales and networks captures how food sovereignty initiatives work through

multiple scales at once and how their interactions on a global level affects interactions on a local level and vice-versa. In the following sections, I will provide brief historical reviews for both La Conf and CFA in conjunction with the exposition of my ethnographic work, beginning with my experience in France. Both expositions will take into consideration the theoretical framing mentioned above. Finally, I will conclude with a comparative analysis of how the organizations practice food sovereignty through different scalar networks and suggest ideas for future food sovereignty movements in general. My goal is not to assess the success or failure of either organization; rather, I aim to analyze different practical adaptations of food sovereignty and how these adaptations can be useful for the development of other food sovereignty initiatives. Suggestions as to future ethnographic and theoretical work that may be done by others and myself will be provided in my concluding remarks.

### **Food Sovereignty as a Glocalized Concept**

The term and concept of food sovereignty was first introduced by La Via Campesina at the World Food Summit in 1996. At its initial conceptualization, food sovereignty contained seven vital principles: food as a basic human right, agrarian reform, protecting natural resources, reorganizing food trade, ending the globalization of hunger, social peace, and democratic control (Windfuhr 46). While these goals are rather substantial, most food sovereignty movements begin by advocating for the increased participation of rural citizens in national and international policymaking, involving them directly in the politics that most affect their lives and allowing them to shape agricultural and trade reform (Windfuhr 5). Recent scholarship, specifically the work of Hannah Wittman, Annette Aurélie Desmarais, and Nettie Wiebe, has elaborated on these principles and their practical applications by drawing on and developing critical theories on

agroecology, seed sovereignty, feminist political ecology, and the localization of food systems, to name a few. These critical theories are interdependent; agroecology, or the “application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agroecosystems,” necessitates the practice of seed sovereignty (Altieri 121). Based on “access to biologically resilient and diverse seeds that can be utilized under changing climatic conditions,” seed sovereignty embraces “peasant innovation in the face of the monopolization of agriculture by transnational companies” (Wittman 99). Furthermore, feminist political ecology is used to address the “base inequality of power” that prevents the disadvantaged peasantry from attaining rights over their land, seeds, and products (Patel 194). The localization of food systems is also implicit in these theories, prioritizing small-scale agricultural production to feed people locally as opposed to “subsidized exports, food dumping, artificially low prices and other characteristics of the current model of agricultural trade” (Windfuhr 15). Through mutual reinforcement, these theories clarify and build upon the basic seven principles mentioned above, opening up new ways of practically applying such lofty goals.

Michael Windfuhr and Jennie Jonsén have also provided an extensive overview of the food sovereignty framework, its challenges, and its potential while analyzing the institutional framework of La Via Campesina. Focusing on the potential and constraints of adopting and implementing food sovereignty policies within national and international contexts, they claim that “food sovereignty poses challenges to the current political system, requiring states to regain necessary international policy space in order to address rural poverty and hunger” (Windfuhr 31). However, the creation of this policy space does not ensure the promotion of national policies that reflect the interests of the peasantry; therefore, the “right to food” as an international legal standard is “an extremely important additional element to make national governments

accountable to people facing hunger and malnutrition” (Windfuhr 34). La Via Campesina as a decentralized international organization is uniquely positioned to work with state governments and international regulatory bodies to develop and enforce this “right to food” (Windfuhr 35). Moreover, Raj Patel’s work illuminates the intersections of international development policy and power that has created an unequal global food system, thereby necessitating a “right to food” for all peoples as a “precondition to food sovereignty” (Patel 186).

In regard to the current state of peasantry, Sofia Naranjo, Annette Aurélie Desmarais, Itelvina Masioli, and Paul Nicholson have provided theoretical and ethnographic insights while utilizing the concept of food sovereignty. Sofia Naranjo explores five factors that marginalize peasants and cause rural poverty,<sup>3</sup> claiming that “addressing these factors through policies devised with active participation of peasants” will end marginalization and “contribute to the achievement of food sovereignty” (Naranjo 231). Annette Aurélie Desmarais focuses on La Via Campesina as the international body through which peasants can influence policies and empower themselves. Moreover, La Via Campesina has taken back the term “peasant” as a “politicized, place-bound identity that reflects the belief that they (the peasants) have a right to be on the land and an obligation to produce food” (Desmarais 140). Itelvina Masioli and Paul Nicholson, two leaders of La Via Campesina and self-proclaimed peasants, echo these sentiments and provide “a small window their respective struggles for food sovereignty.”<sup>4</sup> Clearly, the body of literature on peasantry and rural sociology is much broader; nevertheless, these authors are notable due to their direct engagement with the concept of food sovereignty in order to bring to light new ways

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<sup>3</sup> According to Naranjo, the factors that lead to the marginalization of peasants are as follows: “the land that they have or can access, the peasants’ freedom to control land and related generated resources, the peasants’ possibilities for earning or accessing money, the peasants’ freedom to allocate their own labour time to their own agriculture, and the peasants’ access to markets and traders” (236).

<sup>4</sup> Itelvina Masioli is a member of the Brazilian Landless Rural Workers Movement and a previous member of La Via Campesina’s International Coordinating Commission. Paul Nicholson is a Basque peasant movement leader and a founding leader of La Via Campesina (Masioli 33).

of addressing issues particular to rural societies and empower the people upon whom their studies are based.

Other academics such as Jeffrey Ayres, Michael Bosia, and Madeleine Fairbairn have analyzed specific food sovereignty movements. In their collaborative piece, Jeffrey Ayres and Michael Bosia question the ways in which food sovereignty has been appropriated in different international settings, focusing on France and Vermont as case studies. While their work informs how to think about the food sovereignty concept in local contexts, their data consists largely of historical accounts of the movements taken from websites and news sources. In a similar fashion, Madeleine Fairbairn offers a critique of the transformative potential of food sovereignty in the U.S. context by analyzing certain group's definition of the concept as written on their websites. Although these works and the critical theories mentioned above are important for the development of food sovereignty as a concept, the day-to-day development of food sovereignty by organizations in specific communities is often glossed over, begging the question as to what food sovereignty looks like in practice.

Some researchers have performed the necessary ethnographic work to answer this question; notable are Sarah Wright, Wilhelmina Quayle et. al, Mônica Martins, and Peter André. Focusing on one social movement from the Philippines called MASIPAG, a small network led by farmers committed to small-scale sustainable agriculture, Sarah Wright's work is meant to "build on the literature by expanding understandings of just what food sovereignty means in practice" (200-201). Her aim in doing so is to "contribute some evidence on the effects of food sovereignty on small farmers that can cut through the rhetoric surrounding food and agriculture" (201). With a similar goal in mind, Wilhelmina Quayle et. al conducted an ethnographic study to examine the effect of global-local interactions on food production and consumption in Ghana.



While their study highlights the continued popularity of staple foods such as rice, “local production systems need renewed policy attention” in order to reduce dependency on imported rice products and promote food sovereignty (Quaye 364). Their study concludes by suggesting that “policy interventions should pay attention to the uniqueness of locally based foods that can be improved with appropriate technologies” and “rural communities need to get organized for improved production practices that reflect consumption dynamics” (Quaye 364). Finally, Peter Andrée’s study on the limits and possibilities of alternative food networks in Australia gives a nuanced perspective of how individual farmers and agricultural workers are using techniques such as community supported agriculture (CSA), building farmer’s markets, and permaculture to further food sovereignty initiatives in their communities. Although these techniques are market-driven and therefore imbued with a neoliberal mentality, “many of these networks achieve environmental and social benefits,” support the growth of collective, community-based action, and represent “the first steps toward governmental mechanisms based on the mindsets of their farmer participants” (Andrée 166).

These ethnographic pieces highlight the differential uses of the food sovereignty concept by specific groups, uses that are often dependent on social, political, and spatial contexts. Here, the idea of glocalization is useful in making sense of these practical adaptations. Glocalization refers to the simultaneity and “interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas” (Ritzer 193). Following Roland Robertson, glocalization takes issue with the large-scale, causal phenomena of globalization that is often contrasted with local perspectives (26). Ideas about globalization assume that it is “a homogenizing process that overrides the local”; however, this assumption obfuscates “the dynamics of the production and reproduction of difference” still extremely relevant through the world (Robertson 29). Robertson

suggests the term “glocalization” in order to focus on this interpenetration of local and global forces, stating that “it makes no good sense to define the global as if the global excludes the local. Defining it in such a way suggests that the global lies beyond all localities, as having systemic properties over and beyond the attributes of units within a global system” (34).

Glocalization thus gives analytical attention to how localities critically adapt, resist, or reshape global forces. Furthermore, the term highlights the resulting dynamic processes of economic, social, and cultural homogenization and heterogenization relevant to the continued production of difference in today’s world (Giulainotti 134). It is important to recognize here that the interpenetration of global and local forces is often uneven due to the hegemonic power of global economic and political systems. Nevertheless, these forces should not be analytically pitted against each other; rather, the recognition that “the global increasingly involves the creation and incorporation of the local, processes which themselves largely shape, in turn, new forms of the global” allows us to question power dynamics and the fluid relationships between global and local forces (Robertson 40).

Although some academics such as Erik Swyngedouw use the term “glocalization” to refer specifically to economic processes of development, social, material, and cultural processes are also glocal; moreover, these processes uniquely coalesce in specific places, producing different results, and in some ways reshaping the processes themselves. For example, the formation of cultural identities specific to a locality is a glocal process, as posed in Marwan Kraidy’s ethnographic study that sheds light on how “Maronite youth in Lebanon articulate local and global discourses to enact cultural identity” (465). Here, global media intersects with locality, constructing competing discourses between modernity and tradition consumed by the youth as viable identities. This same process of building cultural identity may be different depending on

the locality in question and the global forces affecting the locality. Thus, cultural identities, previously assumed to be either remnants of the local or new articulations of globality, are created through processes of glocalization.

Food sovereignty is also a product of glocalization. Through its mobilization in and adaptation to specific places, it comes to be redefined and remployed on local, regional, and global scales. Consequentially, food sovereignty is an idea that is in continual formation and negotiation; theory influences practice, and practice influences theory. To give a concrete example, the original conceptualization of food sovereignty did not contain wording to include the vast amount of fishery communities throughout the world. As La Via Campesina grew to include movements in Southeast Asia, the concept was adjusted to include problems specific to these fishery-based communities. Food sovereignty has more recently been altered by farmers' experiences in the U.S. with genetically modified organisms (GMOs), bringing new meaning to the central tenant of protecting natural resources. Finally, most groups that are affiliated with La Via Campesina share their practical adaptations of food sovereignty through online newsletters or participation in semi-annual global forums. By doing so, groups from different social, political, and cultural contexts can provide practical experiences that inform new, glocal ways of thinking about food sovereignty. In light of my experiences in both France and Kentucky, food sovereignty as a glocal concept will be further analyzed below.

### **Glocalization of Space and Scale**

The concept of glocalization hinges upon the idea that localities are socially produced. Here, I am using the term "locality" to refer to "a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity that yields

particular sorts of material effects” (Appadurai 182). In contrast, when using the terms “communities,” “specific place,” or “local place,” I am referring to a physical agglomeration of people and their built or natural environments. The effect of such usage is to separate the idea of the local from its physical manifestation. Although the former does in part come from and also affect the latter, equating the two does little to help understand the different and often dialectical processes by which they are both produced.

People create localities in the face of a deterritorialized world through the use of the social imaginary, a historicized, contextual system of ideas about how people function and what life is supposed to be like in that place and at that time (Appadurai 31). Similar in concept to Anderson’s “imagined communities,” the creation of locality requires the assertion of certain ideas by people in positions of power as powerful organizing principles of the social imaginary, many of which come to be hegemonic and widely accepted and asserted by most in the community. Beyond this colonization of the imagination, people create, assert, or even resist locality “through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation, and action” (180). The process of producing locality is an active negotiation within a community between people with varying types of power. Furthermore, “locality-producing activities are not only context-driven but are also context generative” (186); every negotiation of an existing locality creates new types of recursive and reflexive contexts. Nevertheless, it is important to note here is that “locality is always emergent from the practices of local subjects in specific places” (198). In other words, locality is more than the sum of people’s actions. Rather, it is created through the interworkings of people, place, and their unique historical context.

Today, the production of locality is more often than not a glocal process; “much of what is often declared to be local is in fact the local expressed in terms of generalized recipes”

(Robertson 29). People are constantly influenced by the increased interconnectedness of the world as a consequence of the mass media and migratory processes. These influences affect one's social imaginary, changing what is perceived as possible within the context of a physical place. Although one could (as I do) see this process as a type of glocalization, many scholars and people alike view the proliferation and adaptation of global forms as a threat to local places and localities. The recent local food movement, particularly in the U.S., is a reaction against what is seen as this loss of locality and "a call to action under the claim that the counter to global power is local power" (Dupuis 361). Spearheaded by Alice Waters and her upscale Californian restaurant Chez Panisse, the local food movement has slowly gained popularity since its beginning in the 1970s. Localism is generally depicted as the ethical solution to the unjust global industrial agricultural system; locavores, or consumers who buy local, support small-scale farmers, buy largely organic, seasonal produce, go to farmer's markets, and insist on the humane raising of animals. Many producers have developed direct marketing schemes such as community supported agriculture (CSAs) and store fronts to increase personal autonomy and relationships between themselves and consumers (Starr 483). Most importantly, the localization of food systems is meant to bolster local economies and sustainable agriculture, create new networks between local actors, and produce a missing sense of locality; "the driving force of the local food movement is food as community instead of commodity" (Starr 484).

Localism in Europe stems from different social, political and spatial relationships. Developed in conjunction with the process of reforming the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, European localism tends to be a way of protecting rural economies from trade liberalization as well as insuring quality for consumers. Supporters of local food systems in Europe view their actions as political "strategies to realize a Eurocentric rural imaginary and defend its cultural

identity against a US-dominated, corporate globalization” (DuPuis 360). In France, the notion of terroir, artisanal wine and cheese production, and its cultural food traditions have all been rebranded as local in the production of a French rural imaginary. While this type of localism has benefits for small-scale farmers and artisanal producers, it is primarily an investment in national traditions and cultural capital in resistance to globalization and immigration, often promoting protectionist and ethnocentric ideologies.

Many scholars have heralded the local food movement for its ethicality and sustainability despite these ethnocentric tendencies. However, other scholars such as E. Melanie DuPuis, David Goodman, and Clare Hinrichs have rightly questioned “the ways in which localization might relate to various existing forms of power” and reassert neoliberal capitalistic mentalities (DuPuis 365). Localism tends to assume that the needs of any given community are homogenous without considering differences in social and economic class. Often, those who can afford to be locavores or participate in other localizing activities determine how food system localization comes about in their community, thereby reinforcing these divisions. In their recent study on local food movements in Iowa, Clare Hinrichs and Kathy Kremer found that most participants in local food systems tend to be white, middle-class consumers; moreover, “increasing the inclusion of low-income participants in a local food system project may have limited effects on broader social class inclusiveness” (67). Finally, the idea that localism fundamentally combats the injustices of global industrial agriculture is problematic; local scales are not just in and of themselves. Scales, like localities, are socially produced, and therefore do not have external extent, function, or quality (Born 196). Rather, “the outcomes produced by a food system are contextual: they depend on the actors and agendas that are empowered by the particular social relations in a given food system” (Born 196). Localization is a scalar strategy used to produce certain outcomes, not

an end in itself. In order to create a local food system that is inclusive and democratic, it is necessary to have an understanding of specific social, political, and economic relations within communities as well as a consideration of the needs of all people, regardless of socioeconomic status.

With the proliferation of globalization theories in the past thirty years, scholars have been questioning previously held notions of scale, a surprisingly undertheorized yet essential concept in Geography. The concept of scale was largely assumed prior to the 1980s to be a logical way of dividing the world into manageable pieces for the purposes of analysis (Herod 6). According to this conceptualization, scales are both proportional and hierarchical; as separate and distinguishable entities, scales delimit social and areal boundaries, creating a hierarchy from the local to the global (Herod 14). As such, scales are reified, or conceived of as already existing spatial resolutions between which social actors simply relocate themselves. This idea of scales as something between which social actors can jump or as levels on which to operate simultaneously, however, “misses the point that scales do not exist except through the social practices by which they are, in fact, constituted” (Herod and Wright 11). Social actors relocating to different scales or working between them are instances of producing scales that are negotiable and fluid rather than limited or hierarchical. Finally, actors reproduce scales in unequal ways do to power, money, information, and other resources; scales are not innocent divisions of the world, but often represent political agendas, power struggles, and capitalist motivations (Herod and Wright 11).

In order to prioritize the processes by which scales are socially produced, Richard Howitt, among others, has theorized scale as a matter of relation. Scales are constructed in dialectical relation to each other; in other words, the production and reproduction of different

scales is mutually constitutive. For example, the global is only global insofar as it is defined and created both with and against some other scale, be it the local, regional, or national. What is important here is that it is the dynamic relation between the two scales as well as the continual social production of this relation that define them. Furthermore, scales exist simultaneously within physical places; the unique relations between scales in any given place gives rise to a system of networks through which social actors (whether considered local, global, or anywhere in between) interact. Here, networks are defined as “the ways in which people and things work to build the world but only through operating in combination with other actants who define the field of possible movement” (Latham 34). Networks in this sense focus on the fluid associations between people, groups, and their material realities, and how these associations create the potentiality for change (Latham 34). Finally, the relational understanding of scales and networks can be used to capture how food sovereignty initiatives develop. Rather than only being local, regional, or global, food sovereignty initiatives work through multiple scales and networks at once; in other words, their interactions on a global level affect their interactions on a local level and vice-versa. Moreover, they work with other actors on every scale, creating new networks that can lead to desired social, political, economic, and environmental changes. It is this creation and navigation of scales and networks that will be explored below as applied to La Conf’s and CFA’s food sovereignty initiatives.

### **Project Design**

In light of this breadth of scholarship, I conducted ethnographic research to explore on-the-ground food sovereignty as enacted by La Conf and CFA, seeking to answer the central question of how the concept of food sovereignty is adapted to and reshaped by different contexts,



social relationships, and cultural forms. Fieldwork in both Kentucky and Bagnolet was performed during the summer of 2014 and consisted of qualitative, on-site interviews with members and participant observation. Interview questions were focused on the organizations' histories, day-to-day activities, community operations, and participation in local and national politics. Most interviews were one-on-one, during which I was able to ask more questions about the person's own experience in agriculture and with the food sovereignty movement in general. These are crucial details that cannot be gleaned simply from looking at websites, manifestos, or critical literature. I was also able to observe the on-goings of two farms: a vegetable farm owned by a member of CFA located in Barren River County, Kentucky, and a pig farm owned by the national secretary of La Conf located in Châlons-en-Champagne. Other participant observation included going to farmers' markets, talking with locals about the respective organizations, eating at local restaurants, and sitting in on organizational meetings in order to corroborate my experiences with those of local subjects. I also collected academic and media resources on both organizations as evidence that will help me analyze and corroborate information gained in interviews. These experiences and resources have helped me establish specific details about each organization and their contexts that will allow me to assess and compare their work in their communities and their engagement with the movement at large.

However, it is important to note that my experiences were short; I spent one week in France and five days in Kentucky, visiting specific locales and interviewing at most twenty people. I was also much more comfortable conducting interviews in Kentucky due to the lack of language and cultural barriers. As a result, I talked with more people and discussed more topics, making my research in Kentucky richer than my experience in France. In what follows, my observations and conclusions are therefore necessarily limited due to time constraints and the

aforementioned barriers. Nevertheless, this type of ethnographic work is essential to the understanding and development of food sovereignty initiatives.

### **France: La Confédération Paysanne, Pigs, and Paris**

Driving through Champagne with Claude Cellier, the National Secretary of La Conf, was a rather enchanting experience. While most farms in the region are either vineyards or large, industrial operations for growing wheat and barley, now and then I caught glimpses of hand-made signs boasting fresh asparagus, spinach, and other seasonal produce. Champagne, like most other regions outside of major French cities, has remained primarily agricultural; small, impoverished towns dot the hillsides, only occasionally interrupted by a Carrefour or Brioche Dorée. Although many people living in the region used to grow their own crops to feed their families and their community, most agricultural workers are now employed by vineyards or not at all. In 2013, the unemployment rate in Champagne stood at 10.4%, and only 7% of those who are currently employed work in agriculture (“Champagne-Ardenne”). There are, however, people who do put up roadside produce stands or go to regional markets to sell their goods, representing a dwindling number of paysans, a word traditionally used for peasants that now denotes people who maintain a rural, agricultural lifestyle. These are the people for whom La Conf was created.

La Conf is first and foremost a labor union for agricultural workers. Founded in 1987, it is a product of two decades of struggle against the imposition of modernization reforms and industrial agriculture by the French state after WWII (Kuper 23). This process of modernization and commercialization was embraced by the FNSEA (Fédération nationale des syndicats d’exploitants agricoles), the main agricultural union at that time. Nonetheless, the French peasantry, particularly in Larzac, Bretagne, and Loire, resisted the process, forming new groups

and at times leaving the union altogether (Kuper 24). La Conf was formed out of this resistance as a united voice in defense of rural agriculture and the paysan; today, they are present in twenty-two regions in France and work in all levels of government. La Conf is also a founding member of La Via Campesina and continues to work internationally with other food sovereignty movements. Through this alliance, governmental presence, and countless political demonstrations in France, they aim to “protect rural livelihoods and develop an alternative agricultural model that respects farmers and responds to the needs of society at large.”<sup>5</sup> Although food sovereignty is not listed as their primary objective, they adapt the concept by insisting upon “rural agriculture, autonomous farmers, local development, quality, sustainability, and equality.”<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the purpose of my research is to observe these principles at work and not just read what organizations may say on their websites. With this goal in mind, I contacted La Conf and set up an interview at their offices in Bagnolet in addition to a visit to Claude Cellier’s pig farm in Champagne.

Getting to La Conf’s office was difficult enough (an hour taxi ride through busy Parisian streets) without the added pressure that comes with fieldwork. Although I am conversationally fluent in French and have lived in France before, I was particularly nervous throughout my experience; it was my first time doing fieldwork, and, naturally, I felt unprepared. I had my set of questions, memorized and perfectly written in my notebook, and my phone for recording the interview, but what I didn’t have was a sense of how to make an interview into a conversation or how to bridge the inevitable cultural gap between my interlocutors and myself. Regardless, I stepped up to the gate and walked into what seemed more like a compound than an office, ready

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<sup>5</sup> La Confédération Paysanne souhaite inventer un modèle agricole qui respecte le paysan et réponde aux attentes de la société (“Qui Sommes-Nous?”).

<sup>6</sup> L’agriculture paysanne, il s’agit de l’autonomie, le développement local, la qualité, le transmissibilité, et la répartition (“Qui Sommes-Nous?”).

to observe and ask questions. I was greeted by a woman carrying a case of amazingly sweet peaches, picked fresh that morning. She informed me that Claude Cellier was busy, and I'd have to wait, but I could have a peach. Claude emerged shortly after, introducing himself with the traditional French bisous and escorting me into the main building where his coworkers were having a meeting. To my surprise, Claude invited me into the meeting to get a sense of what they do in the office. The topic was TAFTA, the not yet existent Trans-Atlantic Free Trade Agreement to be voted on by the E.U. in the coming months. La Conf has been lobbying against any such agreement since its initial proposition a few years ago, and that day's meeting was just one strategic planning session among many.<sup>7</sup>

After awkwardly introducing myself as an American student interested in French agriculture and food, I joined one of the groups discussing ways to gain public support against TAFTA. The discussion was fast, and the French was colloquial, but I managed to keep up and chim in once or twice, to the surprise of the older farmers at the table. Suggestions varied from increasing protests to having a meeting with Collectif Européen and the National Family Farm Coalition in Dijon, France. By the end of the discussion, the consensus seemed to be that they had to mobilize French citizens who already lead an alternative lifestyle: students, professors, artists, members of labor unions, and anti-GMO consumers. We presented our ideas to the other groups, debated a few points, and eventually ended in agreement that something must be done. Naturally, the decision as to what to actually do was left for the next meeting.

Claude, a woman named Claude Giroud, and myself left the larger group to start the interview. While my questions were mainly about the history of La Conf<sup>8</sup> and their daily

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<sup>7</sup> TAFTA has since been renamed as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), but negotiations are still on-going between the U.S. and the E.U. La Conf currently has a petition against the agreement that one can sign on their website.

organizational activities,<sup>9</sup> I wanted them to explain to me in their own words how they develop food sovereignty and what this process means for France. The most striking part of the interview came when I asked if they have a long-term strategy,<sup>10</sup> to which Mme Giroud simply replied, to stay relevant. The number of French farmers is incredibly low, and without them, La Conf no longer has members, political power, or a purpose in general. Claude elaborated, stating that most young people do not have the finances, the knowledge, or the want to start farming. There are some schools that still teach traditional methods, but these are few and far between and often looked down upon. Finally, I asked if La Conf has collaborated in the past with other groups, hoping to understand how they stay involved in the food sovereignty movement at large.<sup>11</sup> Most of the programs put on by La Conf are meetings between groups, both inside and outside of Europe. As members of La Via Campesina, they attend annual organizational meetings and help other affiliated groups who are just starting their initiatives. I was encouraged by Mme Giroud at the end of the interview to contact them again in hopes of setting up one of these gatherings in the U.S., as she was particularly interested in my future fieldwork in Kentucky.

I returned to my hotel that night, mind whirling. A few of my questions remained unanswered, at least to my standards; how does La Conf create social connections between consumers and producers,<sup>12</sup> and how does France's culinary traditions affect the implementation of food sovereignty?<sup>13</sup> I was determined to ask Claude the next day during our trip to

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<sup>8</sup> Pourriez-vous donner un récit bref de la Confédération? Quand êtes-vous fondées et par qui? Pourquoi est-ce que vous êtes fondées à cette période?

<sup>9</sup> Quelles sont des activités les plus importantes que vous faites quotidiennement pour mettre en ouvre la souveraineté alimentaire?

<sup>10</sup> Avez-vous une stratégie à long terme?

<sup>11</sup> Comment collaborez-vous avec les autres organisations en europe qui sont affiliées avec La Via Campesina? Avez-vous collaboré avec des organizations à l'extérieur de l'europe? Avec quelles organizations et pourquoi? Que était-il le résultat de ces collaborations?

<sup>12</sup> Comment recréez-vous du lien social entre les consommateurs et les producteurs?

<sup>13</sup> Comment est-ce que la culture de la France, précisément la culture culinaire, affecte la souveraineté alimentaire en France?

Champagne. As it turned out, I had plenty of time to ask these questions and more, as he decided to take the scenic route through the region after leaving the busy Parisian highway. He wanted to show me all the vineyards, the wheat and barley fields, and the various American grave sights remaining from WWII. Needless to say, it was beautiful, made only better by Claude's history lesson and constant narration as to what crops were being grown where. We were headed to Châlons-en-Champagne, one of the biggest towns in the region. Most of the villages we passed through were tiny in comparison; according to Claude, they used to be bigger and nicer when agriculture was the primary livelihood. Now, most of the paysan have died, moved away, or sold their farms and houses to companies, stunting population growth and making any future economic revitalization doubtful. I did, however, see a few signs of what Claude described as short circuits,<sup>14</sup> or local foodways created by a few community members. Most of these people have backyard gardens or very small plots, selling whatever they grow to neighbors. Claude used to sell asparagus every spring but has since passed on his small operation to another person. Nevertheless, he seemed hopeful about the growth of short circuits as a way to develop community self-reliance.

By mid-morning, we arrived at his pig farm just outside of Châlons-en-Champagne, and again, I was unprepared. I naively imagined there to be happy pigs roaming around and eating roots outside; instead, there were a few buildings that housed about one hundred and twenty pigs. The inside rooms were dimly light and extremely small with pigs divided between pens according to age and size. Claude's brother Pierre joined us on the tour, opening windows as we went to help mediate the intense smell. I tried to stay out of the rooms in general, only poking my head in to take a quick glance while trying to stay calm. To my dismay, Claude and Pierre

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<sup>14</sup> Les circuits courts ou locaux

took me into another room where they kept the sows confined to metal crates only big enough for them to either stand or lay down. We finally went outside where a few of the adult male pigs were able to move freely in between a small hut and a decently sized muddy area. These were the only pigs I saw that seemed relatively content, though even they showed signs of stress such as biting each others' tails and restless motion. I was so taken aback by what I was seeing that it took me a few minutes to even remember that I was supposed to be asking Claude questions. After a few minutes, I asked him why he kept his pigs inside and why he used sow crates, to which he replied that it is better for their health in both cases to do so; the pigs would get too cold at night if they were outside and the sows may abort if they move around too much during pregnancy. He was completely unperturbed by these questions, saying that "it's a little industrial, but it's how things are done."<sup>15</sup> I didn't respond; rather, I was trying to push my preconceived notions aside and understand his point of view as a pig farmer and a paysan. I still doubt that I was completely successful in doing so, but I was able to relax and continue asking questions, making my experience better overall.

After a few hours of mixing feed and piling hay onto a rather high loft, Claude and I went into town for lunch. I still had a few questions to ask such as whether he owned his farm and to whom he sold the pigs.<sup>16</sup> Like most paysans, Claude inherited his farm from his father and owns most of the equipment; he does, however, share his two tractors with two other farmers in order to reduce the cost of owning and operating the machines. He also cuts costs by growing most of his own feed that is non-GMO and saving seeds rather than buying them from corporations such as Monsanto or Cargill. Because of the quality of the feed and the relatively small size of his operation, his pigs are considered high quality and are sold at a premium. Nevertheless, there are

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<sup>15</sup> C'est un peu industriel, mais c'est comme ça.

<sup>16</sup> Est-ce que vous êtes le foncier de votre ferme? À qui vendez-vous vos produits? Est-ce que vous vendez vos produits directement aux consommateurs, ou est-ce qu'il y a des distributeurs à qui vous les vendez?

no abattoirs in Champagne, forcing Claude to sell his pigs live to a distributor who transports them to Bretagne where most abattoirs in France are located. The pigs are then processed, labeled as natural and non-GMO, and sold in grocery stores throughout France. Claude does not, therefore, have any interaction with the consumers who buy his products, making it extremely hard for him to contribute to La Conf's goal of building relationships between producers and consumers.<sup>17</sup>

I did, however, gain some insight into how members of La Conf try to build these relationships during my interview with Claude and Mme Giroud. As an organic vegetable farmer in Bourgogne, Mme Giroud travels with her produce every Friday and Saturday to the market in Dijon. Coincidentally, I frequented this market while living in Dijon during the spring of 2013 and became acquainted with a few of the vendors. The people from whom I bought vegetables were all farmers (I asked), but Mme Giroud made it clear that not all the vendors actually grew their own products. As a result, it has become increasingly hard for her to build trust with customers, most of whom continually question her authenticity and her use of organic methods. Moreover, some customers have a romanticized idea of agriculture and local food systems; Mme Giroud recounted one interaction with a customer who insisted that her green beans were not local because her farm was not in Dijon. Another customer thought it was wrong for her to use a tractor because organic vegetables should be artisanal and therefore planted by hand. Nevertheless, Mme Giroud does have customers with whom she interacts on a regular basis; many of these people have become supporters of La Conf, and a few have even come to help her at her stand on busy Saturday mornings. For Mme Giroud, this interaction and support is

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<sup>17</sup> Nous devons recréer du lien social entre les consommateurs et les producteurs ("Qui Sommes-Nous?").



essential to creating relationships between producers and consumers, leading to a more nuanced understanding of their different yet interconnected positions in society.

Moreover, Mme Giroud's interactions with customers and other people at the marketplace represent a network through which she, and by association La Conf, works to promote food sovereignty as well as a particular version of locality in which the local is necessarily rural, small-scale, and sustainable (or, if you will, *paysan*). This network is obviously at the local scale, with consumers, producers, and the market itself as the main social actors. However, La Conf's regional and national work affect and are affected by this local network; for example, by lobbying against TAFTA and the flooding of their market by lower-priced, American goods, La Conf will make it easier for more small farms to remain economically viable operations, which in turn means that the farmers can continue to sell their products at the marketplace in Dijon. Furthermore, the international meeting against TAFTA that Mme Giroud suggested to take place in Dijon represents a network not yet built, one whose production depends on interscalar relationships. Mme Giroud is both utilizing her social and political networks at the local scale in Dijon and at the global scale through La Via Campesina, gathering social actors to a meeting whose topic is both regional and global. Finally, the short-circuits that Claude pointed out to me are also examples of interscalar networks. While these seem to be only local in scale, the fact that these *paysans* are able to maintain these short-circuits is due to La Conf's lobbying on a national scale against the imposition of large-scale agriculture by the French state and the control of inputs by organizations such as Monsanto or Cargill. Claude said that the farmers who sell locally save their seeds and share them with each other so as to remain independent; this local network is made possible and influenced by the larger interscalar network built by La Conf. These are just a few examples of how La Conf works through interscalar

networks with other social actors in order to protect the paysan and their rural, agricultural lifestyle.

Furthermore, La Conf's glocal adaptation of food sovereignty is one in which the rights and autonomy of paysans is the overarching focus. While this is completely compatible with La Via Campesina's definition of food sovereignty, it is interesting that La Conf does not take into account the consumer oriented economy and culture in France when developing their idea of food sovereignty.<sup>18</sup> I asked Claude and Mme Giroud about this omission, curious as to whether food sovereignty in France would have room for restaurants, boulangeries, patisseries, marketplaces, and all the other gastronomic, cultural aspects of France. For them, these stores, restaurants, and overall cultural traditions surrounding food necessitate the existence of large-scale, industrial agriculture, meaning that they are not compatible with food sovereignty in its most perfect realization. Rather than fight these ingrained cultural aspects, La Conf largely accepts and ignores them, focusing their political and social work on protecting farmer's rights and mobilizing consumer support through political rallies and petitions; they are, after all, a labor union for agricultural workers. The organization is thus structurally predisposed to have the paysan as their main (and sometimes only) focus. La Conf's glocal version of food sovereignty can therefore be interpreted as food sovereignty for the paysan rather than for French society in general.

The preceding ethnographic research depicts how La Conf adapts the concept of food sovereignty and works through interscalar networks to protect the paysan; however, as mentioned above, my research was limited due to time constraints, cultural barriers, and my intermediate understanding of the French language. Interviewing more members of La Conf and

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<sup>18</sup> Of course, this is a judgement on my part based on my interviews with Claude and Mme Giroud as well as my interpretation of La Conf's website and supplemental materials.

visiting more farms would have undoubtedly influenced my conclusions. Working with the data that I do have, it is evident that La Conf as an organization works mainly through global, national, and regional networks with La Via Campesina and the French state to develop policies that protect the paysan against corporate control and international competition. Their members, however, build different networks through local relationships with consumers, other farmers, and those who support the movement in general. These are the networks that La Conf should focus on expanding in the future. Moving forward, an ethnographic look at CFA in Kentucky followed by a brief comparative analysis of the two organizations will provide examples as to how La Conf could go about building such networks.

### **Kentucky: Community Farm Alliance, Bluebarb Jam, and Appalachia**

You wouldn't think so, but the combination of blueberries and rhubarb makes a really good jam, especially when made from scratch. In Kentucky, value-added<sup>19</sup> products such as jams, pies, pickled vegetables, and canned tomatoes have been popping up at farmer's markets and local stores due to the recent passage of food safety regulations allowing small producers to process and sell these items. Many of these products carry the Kentucky Proud label, signifying that the items are grown or raised in Kentucky by small-scale, family farmers; the purpose of this statewide program is to "build a sense of community and invest in Kentucky's land, people, and its future" ("Kentucky Proud"). CFA has played a prominent, if not catalytic, role in the development of this program as well as the changing of regulations that now allow the sale of

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<sup>19</sup> Value-added is defined by the USDA as a change in the physical state or form of a product (such as milling wheat into flour or making strawberries into jam) or the production of a product in a manner that enhances its value, as demonstrated through a business plan (such as organically produced products).

homemade goods. This is just one way, among others, that CFA has helped build local and regional food systems as they work towards the larger goal of food sovereignty in Kentucky.

CFA is a non-profit organization founded in 1985 by tobacco and dairy farmers from several different counties across the state. Similar to the situation in France at that time, agriculture in the U.S. was becoming increasingly commercialized and industrialized, leaving little room for small-scale farms. Most people relied, as they do now, on grocery stores for food, almost all of which was imported from California or Mexico. Kentucky was also still a major producer of tobacco, taking up the majority of the available agricultural land. In the eastern, Appalachian area of Kentucky, few agricultural traditions were still practiced such as backyard gardening and canning; however, these practices were more a means of survival for people living in the most impoverished area of the state. CFA was created under these circumstances to support small-scale farmers by aiding them in bureaucratic and financial matters. In 1987, they became affiliated with the National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC), one of the few organizations in the U.S. who later joined La Via Campesina. As a non-profit, CFA is very small, with at most ten people on staff; however, farmers throughout the state are members and make up an important network through which CFA works. Today, their mission is to “organize and encourage cooperation among rural and urban citizens through leadership development and grassroots democratic processes to ensure an essential, prosperous place for family-scale agriculture in our economies and communities” (“About”).

What is most interesting to note about CFA’s mission statement, beliefs, and policy goals is that they do not use the phrase “food sovereignty.” At first, I discounted CFA for this lack of terminology; however, during my interviews with two CFA staff members, they explained to me that CFA chooses not to use the phrase. Rather, they employ the concept by putting producers

first; for Martin Richards, CFA's executive director, this amounts to "figuring out what farmers need based on what they actually say." He further explained that "food sovereignty is about control of the food system," and CFA's goal is to give that control back to the farmer. Jason Brashear, the East Kentucky Farm to Table Coordinator, explained their choice a bit differently: "food sovereignty is a buzz word that people in the area either overuse or don't get, making it kinda useless when talking with other farmers." He likes to focus on relating to the people with whom he works, which is easy enough due to his background in agriculture and his current livelihood as a goat farmer. Ultimately, CFA may not use the phrase "food sovereignty," but their focus, mission, and work embodies the concept by taking from it what is most useful and adapting it to their particular situation.

Utilizing the idea of food sovereignty, CFA develops community-based projects that act as models that can be replicated throughout the state. These models are meant to spur policy changes, both locally and statewide, and provide examples from which other communities can learn. Jason explained one such model to me: local food crawls. Based in Eastern Kentucky, the program was "developed by work groups consisting of both CFA members and people in the community in an effort to bring awareness of the availability of fresh local foods and to entice locally owned restaurants to buy local" ("What We Do"). The first event included three restaurants and thirty-nine participants. During the crawl, farmers who provided the food spoke about themselves and their farms, creating a connection between the people, agriculture, and place. Jason, who was the head coordinator for the event, believed it had a positive impact; "the crawl brought people who are generations removed from the farm face to face with actual farmers who need their support." When asked about the next event, Jason said that he hopes to coordinate more in different communities throughout Eastern Kentucky, using the first one as an

example. In this way, local food crawls serve as a model for how communities can build networks and a sense of locality that support each other and their economy.

CFA has also been heavily involved in creating farm-to-school networks, bringing fresh, seasonal produce to thousands of children in public schools. Farm-to-school programs have been implemented to some extent in parts of Eastern Kentucky and in Barren River County, the area in which I did fieldwork. In order to start the programs, Jason works with local farmers, regional school systems, and the state government, coordinating a network in which farmers are guaranteed competitive prices and the schools receive financial rewards for participating. Jason is the organizer, but the people who propel the program forward are the farmers and the school officials who develop social and financial relationships. Nevertheless, there are obstacles such as inefficient school bureaucracies and the lack of people to find farmers willing to sell to schools. Jason hopes to develop a system with the state this coming January that contracts farmers, guaranteeing products for the schools and providing stability for the farmers; “as a farmer, it’s good to know that whatever you don’t sell at markets, the schools will buy.” Of course, the farm-to-school programs are about the children who receive the food. Most schools provide the lunches for free and coordinate field days during which the children can meet the farmers and learn where their food comes from. Consequently, the children are also being reconnected to local agriculture as well as a sense of locality.

Local food crawls and farm-to-school programs are just two examples of how CFA adapts and practices food sovereignty, works through different scales by creating networks, and produces locality. Furthermore, CFA’s purpose is to coordinate social actors in communities and empower them to take the lead. Programs developed by CFA are not solely created or managed by staff members; in fact, most programs are created in conjunction with people in the

community, and it is these people who determine how to execute initiatives. CFA also helps different communities work together in developing new food systems, a process that will be further explored below while discussing farmer's markets. In this way, CFA enables communities to practice food sovereignty by defining their own agriculture and food policies and determining the extent to which they want to be self-reliant.

Beyond community organizing, CFA also works as a middleman between farmers and the state. This role has been especially important with the end of large-scale tobacco farming in Kentucky and the influx of money from tobacco settlements. Beginning in the 1990s, CFA has been lobbying in the state's congress for support of tobacco reinvestment programs that aid in the transition away from tobacco farming. Reinvestment programs consist of workshops that teach farmers new production methods and equal distribution of financial support necessary to change their farms. In 2002, "\$184,000,000 in tobacco settlement funds were used to help meet the needs of Kentucky farmers and support the development of a local food economy" ("About"). These funds were given directly to farmers to buy things such as seeds, equipment, and more land, leading to local economic development and improved food systems.

Today, most farms in Kentucky, some of which grew tobacco, are now large-scale grain productions using industrial methods and genetically modified seeds. There are, however, a growing number of small-scale farms throughout the state that produce vegetables and raise livestock using traditional, sustainable, and often organic methods. The farm I visited, owned by CFA members Jennifer and Chris, is a relatively new operation, growing over 140 different varieties of fruits and vegetables. Located in Barren River County, their farm is picturesque, complete with a beautiful old farmhouse, a tire swing, and rolling hills. I hesitated as I drove up, nervous and unsure as to whether it was a farm or just a normal residential property.

Nevertheless, I was more prepared for this visit; after my experience in France, I adjusted interview questions and researched qualitative interview techniques. I was also much more comfortable conducting interviews in Kentucky without major cultural differences or language barriers. With this difference in mind, I stepped out of my car and was immediately at ease.

It was late in the afternoon when I arrived, and Chris had already done most of the work for the day. Our conversation started slowly as he and Jennifer took me on a tour, accompanied by their dog and three children, all of whom were incredibly curious about who I was and what I wanted. Jennifer and Chris had previously owned a smaller, two acre property in a largely residential area of Barren River County; due to zoning issues, they were forced to find a new, preferably larger farm. Because they had recently moved, most of their crops were either at the old property or in the process of being planted by hand (they do not own a tractor), but I did get to see a few rows of peppers ripening in the ninety degree heat. Chris was also in the process of building pens and insulating a small barn in hopes of eventually expanding their operation to include livestock and poultry. After seeing the property, I started asking Chris about production methods and seed sources, hoping to get a better understanding of their aspirations and ideals. Surprisingly, their farm is not certified organic and they do not plan to get this certification. Chris gave me a few reasons for this seeming fault, saying that the climate, pests, and plant diseases in Kentucky make it extremely hard for most farmers to only use organic methods; those who do get certification grow mostly greens such as lettuces, spinach, kale, collards, and swiss chard. Rather than limiting their operation to these vegetables, Chris and Jennifer use mixed methods, only spraying certain crops with pesticides once or twice throughout the growing season. Some of their crops are grown organically, but they choose not to advertise them as organic products at the farmer's market. Rather, they said that they are honest with their



customers, telling them that they use mixed methods depending on the season and weather. As for their seeds, Chris buys them primarily from non-GMO distributors based out of California and New York, but he also saves seeds to swap with other farmers or give to customers.

Heirloom tomato seeds are a particularly popular item in Kentucky, and Chris makes sure to save these both for himself and others as a way to support genetic diversity in agriculture.

Furthermore, Jennifer was particularly adamant about not using the term “organic” to describe their products. Her vision for their farm is to provide accessibility to healthy food for all people while specifically targeting the low-income community in their region. She has found that at farmer’s markets, “low-income people are turned off by the organic label because it has certain connotations of being high-class and more expensive.” Rather than “contributing to these class divisions,” Jennifer chooses to work with other farmers at the market and CFA more generally to develop Double Dollar programs for people receiving SNAP benefits.<sup>20</sup> Double Dollar programs allow anyone who is receiving SNAP benefits to double the value of their money; for example, if they intend to use \$20 of their benefits to buy produce at the farmer’s market, this value automatically gets doubled, allowing them to then spend \$40. Jennifer spearheaded the development of this program at the nearby farmer’s market in Bowling Green where they sell their products. With the help of a few other farmers and CFA’s governmental connections, Jennifer was able to introduce it last year; so far, she thinks it has been successful but is wary that not enough low-income people know about it or even want to come to the farmer’s markets. Recently, she has been working with CFA to come up with new advertising techniques utilizing social media to hopefully reach out to more low-income people in Barren River County.

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<sup>20</sup> SNAP, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is the U.S. government’s current national welfare program designed to provide nutrition assistance to millions of low-income individuals and families.

After being outside in the sweltering heat for an hour, Jennifer and I went into the house to start making dinner from a giant pile of vegetables, eggs, cheese, and some bread leftover from their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) deliveries that week. CSAs are common techniques used by small-scale farmers in which people purchase a “share” of the farm, usually during the winter, in exchange for a weekly portion of the harvest throughout the growing season. This business scheme provides a consistent customer base for farmers as well as much needed stable income. As a major part of their operation, Jennifer and Chris run a CSA in conjunction with a few other producers, and members of their community pay weekly for a delivery of vegetables, eggs, meat, milk, and other value-added products. Their CSA originally started small, only offering about fifty shares with vegetables as the only items. Within the past year, they began working with other local producers in order to provide their now one hundred and twenty shares with the products mentioned above. Jennifer explained that customers can choose which add-ons they would like, making shopping easier and more convenient: “People don’t have to fumble around at the market anymore, they can just make one stop, get all their food, and actually enjoy the experience.” They also try to keep the price of the CSA low; at the time of my visit, it was \$60 per week, comparable (if not less) to the average bill at a grocery store for a small family. Finally, the CSA brings them in constant contact with their customers, furthering their “goal of helping everyone grow in their thinking about food.” They often invite customers out to the farm to see how their vegetables are grown and teach those interested basic gardening and preserving techniques. This type of cooperation has helped build their business; more importantly, it has educated their customers and renewed interests in rebuilding local food systems based on social and economic inclusion and community participation.

In order to further these goals, Jennifer and Chris have recently had a few people intern on their farm, saying that they “want to teach a new generation how to farm at a young age, before they have college debt, financial problems, and office jobs.” Both Jennifer and Chris went to college in Kentucky and got jobs in the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. Because Jennifer came from a single-parent, low-income household, she was able to attend college on scholarships and grants, and Chris had very few loans from community college. They also saved or invested most of the money they earned from their previous jobs. These factors, among others, have made it much easier for them to start an economically viable small-scale farm; however, most people today are either in debt or do not have necessary financial management skills, making it nearly impossible for them to break into agriculture. The purpose of having interns on their farm, therefore, is to teach people how to manage finances and build small-scale agricultural business models in addition to necessary farming skills and marketing techniques. For example, one of their interns is in the process of building a new CSA model based on pre-prepared meals. Rather than giving customers whole foods, the CSA would provide seven pre-prepared meals in addition to value-added products such as jams, pickled vegetables, and bread. According to Jennifer, the goal of this CSA model is to “make eating local easier for those who don’t really like to cook.” They are currently trying to get their kitchen approved by the health department so that they can begin preparing meals. Finally, CFA has been helpful in this process, working more generally with local and state health departments on regulations surrounding value-added products and pre-prepared meals in order to make it easier for small-scale producers to break into the market.

A few hours into our conversation, I asked Jennifer whether she had heard of the concept of food sovereignty; she had not, but she was interested in what it meant. I gave her a basic

definition, to which she replied that it “sounded like what we want to do here in Kentucky.” However, Jennifer explained that the biggest obstacle facing any such development of food sovereignty is the lack of mid-scale sustainable farming. In Kentucky, farms are either small-scale with low yields meant to be sold at farmer’s markets or through CSAs or large-scale industrial operations growing wheat or soybeans; there are no mid-scale vegetable and fruit farms with the capacity and yields necessary to support entire communities. Mid-scale farms “are what you need to be able to sell to restaurants and schools and for community access in general.” Currently, Barren River County does have a small farm-to-school program and one restaurant that buys goods from local farmers, but what they do buy only makes up 10% of their total inventory.<sup>21</sup> I was surprised by this number, but Jennifer explained that it can’t be any higher right now: “There simply aren’t farms in the region big enough that can provide a steady supply of products to schools and farms.” However, Jennifer and Chris’s farm has the potential to be one of the only mid-scale farms with this capacity within the next few years. They hope that their farm will be a model upon which other farms can be based in Barren River County.

Towards the end of my visit, Jennifer encouraged me to go to the farmer’s market in Bowling Green before I left the next day. Community Farmer’s Market is a year-round producer-only market that “strives to be an asset to the greater community through various outreach partnerships and initiatives that seek to support the viability of small farms/farmers, increase food access, and build a more resilient local food system” (“Welcome to CFM!”). While walking around the small indoor space, I spoke with a few vendors, bought some cheese and blueberry jam, and tried to get a feel for what life is like in their community. I also noticed their large signs advertising the Double Dollar program, encouraging low-income people to take advantage of it.

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<sup>21</sup> This statistic was given to me by Jason Brashear and reiterated by Jennifer. I also asked the owner of Home Café and Marketplace, the only restaurant in Bowling Green that buys products from local farmers, if this number was an accurate reflection of how many products they actually source locally, to which he replied affirmatively.

Speaking with one producer, he said that “the program helps farmers overcome the price differences and convenience of processed foods” while also making vegetables more accessible to everyone.

Community Farmer’s Market is also a space in which networks between social actors are built and locality is negotiated. Jennifer and Chris’s CSA is an example of one such network, and the cooperation between the state government, CFA members, and the market to introduce the Double Dollar program is another. The latter example also represents how CFA works through multiple scales; working with the state government to develop the Double Dollar program would not be as useful without simultaneously working with local farmers whose businesses could be affected by such matters. CFA’s role is to be this middleman, helping their members bring about change in Kentucky’s food system. Finally, although the market reifies the local scale and creates a particular sense of locality in which the local is automatically preferable, healthier, and better for the community, there is also an awareness that the needs of the community are not homogenous. This awareness is apparent in Jennifer’s devotion to making their products accessible to low-income people as well as the market’s use of the Double Dollar program. Here, locality is being negotiated; a few of the farmers at the market let me know that they didn’t necessarily support the program and that they’d rather be able to sell their organic vegetables to people who pay the full price. Jennifer eluded to this opposition in our conversation, saying that some people didn’t really care about the implicit class divisions. These people’s idea of locality is different than Jennifer’s, and it is these localities that are negotiated at the market where consumers, producers, and people in the community more generally choose and reassert one or the other. Jennifer’s work and the work of CFA more generally hopefully indicate that people in

the community will support the development of food systems based on social and economic inclusion in which everyone has equal access to healthy food.

My conversations with Martin Richards, Jason Brashear, and Jennifer and Chris in addition to my experience in Bowling Green and Barren River County demonstrate that although CFA does not use the phrase “food sovereignty,” their vision, goals, and work in general uniquely adapt the concept to the context of Kentucky agriculture. In addition to helping farmers navigate the political landscape and work with local governments and the state in order to develop new agricultural policies based on their needs, CFA builds networks with other social actors, working between local and regional scales. Finally, they practice food sovereignty by fostering these networks and encouraging their members to get involved in local governments, farm-to-school networks, local food crawls, or farmer’s markets. By doing so, CFA empowers farmers to build new food systems that can then be used as models for food system reform throughout Kentucky.

### **Comparative Analysis**

La Conf and CFA are distinct food sovereignty initiatives with different organizational structures that shape their practical adaptations of the concept of food sovereignty and their on-the-ground work in their respective contexts. My experiences with La Conf were much more difficult than my experience with CFA due to various factors detailed above, causing my ethnographic data to be unbalanced. Nevertheless, a brief comparison of their work and their utilization of interscalar networks is ultimately useful; doing so illuminates ways in which both organizations can move forward with and continually modify their glocal conceptions of food sovereignty.

Fundamentally, La Conf and CFA share similar versions of locality that affect and reinforce their adaptations of food sovereignty. Both groups cite the relocalization of food systems as a primary goal, and both groups reify the local scale, equating it with sustainability, equality, health, and communal economic stability. A comparison can therefore be made between La Conf, CFA, and local food movements as described above; however, there remains a fundamental difference between food sovereignty movements like La Conf and CFA and local food movements in general. The former is expressly political, working with and against governments through regional and international leadership to create policies supporting radical changes in power, while the latter is largely depoliticized without formal leadership and based upon neoliberal capitalistic mentalities. This is not to say that local food movements do not have any potential as social movements to create change, and doing so would be beyond the scope of my research. Nevertheless, food sovereignty movements have greater potential to create radical changes in power by putting producers first and basing the relocalization of food systems on social and economic inclusion. Of course, this potential is not intrinsic to any given food sovereignty movement; La Conf, CFA, and food sovereignty movements in general should be wary of how their vision of locality intersects and influences their practical adaptations of food sovereignty in order to ensure equality among producers and consumers and take into account class divisions.

Furthermore, La Conf and CFA are facing similar obstacles as the amount of farmers in the U.S. and France decreases and farmland becomes more and more difficult to find and purchase. Both organizations recognize the need to help build a new generation of farmers as a partial solution to these problems; however, the ways in which they try to do so are different, and this difference often stems from their uses of interscalar networks. As described by Claude and

Mme Giroud, La Conf is trying to stay relevant to a dwindling number of paysans by representing their interests in regional and national politics. Most of La Conf's work to protect the paysan is done in these arenas by lobbying for and against issues (such as TAFTA) and working with the French state to develop agricultural policies. However, La Conf does not currently have any programs that directly provide support and education for the younger generation of farmers; these programs could be executed locally or regionally, teaching people farming techniques, helping new farmers manage finances, and drumming up interest in the paysan lifestyle in general. Rather than building their food sovereignty movement by directly engaging younger generations, La Conf chooses to protect its current members and their agricultural lifestyles by concentrating their work in national and regional networks formed with other social actors. This lack of engagement also represents a lack of recognition that their work on the local scale should reinforce and influence their work and relationships on the national scale, and vice versa; moreover, this type of mutually constitutive work is vital to La Conf's continued presence in French society. Without the next generation of young farmers, there won't be paysans to protect in the future. Moving forward, La Conf must build local networks and relationships with social actors (preferably young farmers) and allow these relationships to influence and reinforce their regional and national political work.

In contrast to La Conf's approach, CFA works through community-based projects that act as models that can be replicated throughout the state. These models are then used to initiate policy changes, both locally and statewide, and provide examples from which other communities can learn. As detailed above, a few examples of these community-based projects are local food crawls, farm-to-school programs, farmer's markets, and the Double Dollar program. However, it is not the case that these programs are limited to the local scale; rather, they depend on statewide



policy work by CFA as well as community participation by both producers and consumers.

These aspects are the basic starting points from which interscalar networks are formed by CFA, other social actors, and material realities. CFA's approach is then different than La Conf's in that the former builds these networks, resulting in the mutual constitution and reinforcement of their local and regional work. This reflexivity is vital to their development of food sovereignty through grassroot democratic processes; ultimately, CFA is innovative in their use of multiple scales, social networks, and people in actual communities, and this approach is one from which other food sovereignty movements including La Conf can and should learn.

Finally, La Conf and CFA have very different international relationships with other food sovereignty movements and La Via Campesina. La Conf is a founding member of La Via Campesina and continues to attend international conferences and working directly with groups both inside and outside of Europe. They have ties with the NFFC in the U.S., and both organizations are currently planning to coordinate their respective policies on TAFTA and GMOs. La Conf is then utilizing La Via Campesina's pre-existing networks to help bring about food sovereignty in multiple different contexts through multiple different scales. In contrast to this participation, CFA does not currently work with any food sovereignty movements outside of the U.S. and does not participate in conferences or organizational meetings for La Via Campesina. Rather, they work with other organizations within Kentucky such as Southern Foodways Alliance, Grow Appalachia, the Kentucky Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture. While this intrastate cooperation is important to the development of food sovereignty, CFA's lack of engagement with national and international groups is detrimental to the international food sovereignty movement in general. As stated above, CFA's vision of and practical approach to food sovereignty is an innovative model

that could help other movements move forward with their work. CFA therefore should become more involved with other movements through La Via Campesina; such participation provides international support for all peasants and their social and political movements and is vital to the development of food sovereignty throughout the world.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding ethnographic work has identified and analyzed the glocal adaptations and interscalar practical applications of food sovereignty by La Conf and CFA in their respective contexts. Current academic discussions of food sovereignty tend to focus on the concept itself from which theories on agroecology, sustainability, human rights, and peasantry have been and continue to be developed. The day-to-day development of food sovereignty by organizations in specific communities, however, is often glossed over, largely because it is unclear as to what it looks like in practice. My overarching goal was to provide a glimpse, albeit brief, into the on-the-ground development of food sovereignty in an attempt to help fill this academic void. This type of ethnographic work is essential to understanding food sovereignty movements and their work in general. Moreover, this project is an exercise in ethnography; advantages and limitations of this approach consist of language barriers, cultural knowledge, time, and interview techniques, all of which in some way affected my research. As such, my first research attempt in France was a vital learning experience from which my work in Kentucky later benefited.

I chose to theoretically frame this on-the-ground research by utilizing the concepts of glocalization and scale as detailed above; in general, food sovereignty movements create a glocalized version of the concept of food sovereignty, but the ways in which they put it into practice depends on interactions with other social actors and material realities on multiple,

interdependent scales. Nevertheless, future work may utilize theories on assemblages, social movements, topological space, and peasantry, to name a few. Doing so may bring to light different interpretations of my data that could be useful to the understanding of food sovereignty movements and their work in general. Finally, there are variety of questions to be addressed through future ethnographic work that are still up in the air. For example, do food sovereignty movements located in the same region adapt the concept in similar or different ways? How are food sovereignty movements affected by consumerism, and how do these effects vary depending on geographic location? How is the concept of food sovereignty adapted by people living in large cities? How do local food movements and food sovereignty movements intersect, reinforce, or hinder each other? More theoretical and ethnographic work certainly needs to be done by others and myself.

Ultimately, La Conf and CFA share similar conceptions of food sovereignty, yet their practical adaptations are shaped by their respective contexts and utilization of interscalar networks. Both movements put producers first, shaping agricultural policies and community-based projects on the needs of farmers. La Conf tends to focus their work on protecting the rights of farmers and the paysan lifestyle through political action. In a similar fashion, CFA is involved in local and state politics in order to represent farmers' interests, but they also provide ways for consumers and other people, regardless of social or economic class, to become involved in the development of food sovereignty in their communities. These approaches to practicing food sovereignty empower farmers and increase community participation, creating new food systems based on social and economic inclusion. Finally, both movements have areas in which to focus future work: it is important for La Conf to build networks with younger generations of farmers, and it is equally as important for CFA to branch out and begin working with other food

sovereignty movements through La Via Campesina. Increased cooperation between food sovereignty movements in general is vital to the on-going conceptualization of food sovereignty as well as the development of future movements throughout the world.

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